

Armagh Baptist Church Bible Studies
Wednesday 21st April 2010 – 8:00pm
1 Peter 1:22-2:3 – ‘The Importance of God’s Word’

Introduction

An Anglican Bishop in Scotland said recently that the Bible was now irrelevant to the 21st Century. He claimed that its moral guidelines were out-of-date!

Maybe some of you thought the same after my message on the role of women last Sunday morning?

What do you really think? Do you think that God’s Word is out of date on some of these issues? Maybe you feel there is an alternative view that I should have given, or other texts that you think you could use to build a case against what I said on Sunday morning about the role of women? Just in case you weren’t here, I said, on the authority of 1 Timothy ch.2, that women were not allowed to teach or to have authority over men within the local church; that they should learn in quietness and full submission; and that their proper role was as Titus 2 puts it to teach other women and to teach their children. As such women could not be pastors or elders in the local church because elders must be ‘able to teach’ (1 Timothy 3:2).

If you think that the Bible is out of date or irrelevant on some of these issues then how do you reconcile such an idea with what Peter says in 1 Peter 1:23 when he talks about the **‘imperishable, living and enduring Word of God.’** And what do you do with vs.24-25 where Peter states clearly that **‘The Word of the Lord stands forever!’?**

Tonight I want to talk to you about the Importance of the Word of God. I’m going back to the foundations of our faith tonight, but it’s important to remind ourselves regularly of the Authority of Scripture, and what we base our faith on – the Living and Enduring Word of God – not on our own ideas.

First of all I want to remind you of...

1. Its Power (v.23)

Like a seed being placed in the ground is the Word of God being placed in your heart whenever you hear it:

- It seems dead and lifeless and perishing
- It may lie dormant for quite some time, but it’s not ‘dead’!
- Instead it bursts into life! It comes alive! And first of all it causes you to be born again! – i.e. something that appeared ‘dead’ actually gives you ‘life’!

'You have been born again...through the living and enduring Word of God!' (v.23).

Those who are truly born again will never underestimate the potential of the Word of God to change lives.

We believe it has hidden power. It's like dynamite just waiting to go off in somebody's heart. And when it does, they will never be the same again!

Paul agrees with Peter here: **See Romans 10:17**

'Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God.'

So the important thing for us as an evangelical church is to get God's Word out to, and heard by, as many people as possible!

The Old Testament agrees with Peter and Paul too: **See Isaiah 55:9-11**

God's Word will not return to him void, or without accomplishing the purpose He had in mind for it when he sent it out.

That's the Power of God's Word. So let's never underestimate the importance of preaching and teaching God's Word, not our own ideas or theories, but God's Word in all its fullness, chapter by chapter, verse by verse, because every word of it is inspired by God. It must not be twisted or distorted, or just preached as a collection of favourite proof texts, but it must be preached in all its fullness, allowing Scripture to be its own interpreter.

Listen again to what Paul says in 2 Timothy 4:2-5 – **'Preach the Word!'**

It's God's means of saving and equipping, according to 2 Timothy 3:14-17.

So don't underestimate the importance of sowing the seed of God's Word even in the hearts of children. There is no telling when that seed could burst into life and bring salvation to that heart, as it did for Timothy - (2 Tim 3:15).

So that's the Power of God's Word.

But secondly notice in 1 Peter 1:24-25...

2. Its Permanence (vs.24-25)

Peter not only calls it *'The Living Word'*, he also calls it *'The Enduring Word of God!'* (v.23) If something is enduring, then it lasts! It doesn't go out of date, so it can never become irrelevant! But it must be applied specifically to our given situations today in our generation.

Men may think they have out-grown its usefulness – but Peter points us to Isaiah again in vs.24-25. From Isaiah 40:6-8 Peter points out that it is 'men' who are temporary and fleeting – like grass and flowers, but God's Word outlives them all – it stands forever!

Many have tried to stamp out the Bible once and for all, but have failed!

e.g. Until quite recently in Ireland, the Catholic Church told their people that they couldn't understand the Bible without the help of the priest, and they were discouraged from reading it for themselves - so much so that the Bible came to be seen by everyday people as a 'Protestant Book!' But nothing could be further from the truth, the Bible is not a Protestant book – it doesn't belong to one side of the community more than any other – it's for everyone to read! We should be praising God that there is a desire in Ireland today in many hearts to read and study this Book, because as they do God will speak, and God will change lives by His Word!

e.g. In England in the time of John Wycliffe (late 1300s) and in the time of Myles Coverdale (mid 1500s) - early Bible Translators, Bibles were burned by the authorities left, right and centre. The Bible was banned, men tried to stamp it out, but do you know something? Those men are now gone! Like the flowers of the field or the grass, they've withered and perished, but God's Word is still with us, more than ever! It endures because of its permanence.

But thirdly, as well as its power, and its permanence, notice...

3. Its Proclamation (v.25)

Peter says in v.25, '*And this was the Word that was **preached** to you*' following on from that portion he quoted from Isaiah.

That's how enduring God's Word really is:

It's the same Word that Isaiah proclaimed 700 yrs before Christ's birth,

The same that Peter preached in 63AD,

And this is the same Word that is being preached to you also in 2010.

God is still announcing His Word through his servants to this very day! It's important in our day and generation that we don't fail in our proclamation of God's Word. There is no point just having our Bibles, having God's Word, if we just keep it in our churches, or even in our heads and hearts. We have to proclaim it! Preach it! Let it out! Set it free to work!

Peter says, '*This is the Word that was **preached** to you.*'

It is important that God's Word is preached.

Paul agrees with that in Romans 10:14-15.

*'How can they hear without a **preacher**?'*

Preaching is the means whereby God makes His Word known, and we must always give pride of place to the preaching of the Word of God, otherwise God's people will not progress in their faith.

But in 2 Timothy 4:17 Paul uses another word from the same root meaning – '*to proclaim*' = it means to herald, to sound abroad.

We must make sure however we handle God's Word, whether preaching it from a pulpit inside a church, or sharing it more informally on a one-to-one basis, or in discussion groups, or in home-Bible Study groups, we must make sure that we are actually **communicating** our faith, and communicating God's Word to men, women, young people and children today, in a way that they can understand, otherwise we're missing the point!

So however we do it, let's make sure we are faithfully proclaiming God's Word today inside and outside this building.

Its Power, its Permanence, its Proclamation.
But why proclaim it? What's it for? What should its effect be?

4. Its Purpose: To Purify Sinners (v.22, 2:1-2)

The words 'pure' or 'purify' are mentioned twice in these verses. First of all in 2:2 in that statement: '*crave pure spiritual milk*', it is used of the quality of God's Word itself. God's Word must be kept pure if it is to have the impact that it needs to have upon our lives and the lives of the lost outside as well.

To keep it pure we must not add anything to it, nor must we take away anything from it! (See Revelation 22:18-19).
(N.B. Not even the bit about women not teaching or having authority over men in church – even though it goes contrary to popular opinion today!)

We must *preach* God's Word straight, and we must *take* God's Word straight to our hearts. We must not be guilty of watering it down, or of distorting it. When we take it at face value, God's Word can have a tremendous impact upon our lives, if only we'll let it, and not try to explain it all away, whenever it makes us feel uncomfortable.

But secondly in 1:22 it says, '*Now that you have **purified** yourselves...*'
How? '*...by obeying the truth.*'

'**Pure**' doesn't just speak of the quality of God's Word, in and of itself; it should also be allowed to have a '**purifying**' effect upon our lives. We are sinners. It's by believing the truth of God's Word, we get saved. But even though we are saved, we are still sinners – 'saved sinners.'
And so God's Word needs to be allowed to go on having its desired effect of purifying our lives as we read it day by day.

As a Christian, I hope you are reading God's Word day by day, otherwise how do you expect to grow, and how do you expect to change and become more holy, and more pure? (I encourage you to use daily reading notes).

But did you notice in v.22 the kind of effect the reading and obeying of God's Word ought to have in our lives as Christians?

- **We ought to love one another**, deeply and sincerely, from our hearts! That's to be the first evidence that God's Word is at work in our lives as believers! – Is it? Listen to what John says: 1 John 3:14 – evidence of faith. - Look at 2:1 – if we have this genuine love for our brothers and sisters in the Lord, then there are some things we have to get rid of from our lives: **Malice** – evil speaking – saying unkind, hurtful things to or about each other.

Deceit – get rid of all falsehood, half-truths, lies. Instead be straight and honest with our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Hypocrisy – Are we really what we claim to be. Do our lives really back up what we claim to believe? Is there evidence of a change in our lives? Otherwise, if we claim to be something we're not, we're just hypocrites!

Envy – spite, jealousy, covetousness. '*I wish I was like so-and-so, or had what they have, or I wish I was more like them.*' Are we envious of each other? Or do we rejoice when something good happens to somebody else, even though we think we are having a rough time ourselves?

'And get rid of all slander of every kind!' – In other words, there is to be no talking behind backs about each other. No hurtful or harmful gossip about each other. Get rid of it all! Be done with it all!

That's what God means when he talks about the purifying effect of His Word. How far have you and I really got, when we look at it like that? Have we made much spiritual progress at all, or are we just like everybody else?

Maybe we need to confess to the Lord that we have failed in some of these areas. Maybe we need to ask afresh for Him to use His Word right now to wash us clean from these things, and to help us to be done with them.

Because listen to what James says in **James 1:21-26**.

Let God's Word work in *your* life – don't just palm it off to someone else.

That's the purpose of God's Word – to purify us.

And only as we allow it to do that will we be making...

5. Progress in the Christian Life. (2:2-3)

According to v.2, when we get saved, at first we are like newborn babies. i.e. we have just been '**born again**'.

Well newborn babies need to grow – they don't stay the way they are! And just as human babies need milk as their staple diet to make them grow, so we as newborn spiritual babies need spiritual milk as our staple diet to make us grow strong and healthy. (Milk = calcium – for strong bones).

The only way to make any progress in the Christian life is to **crave** the milk of God's Word. Desire it, want it, get it! Then and only then will you grow up in your salvation. Every Christian needs to grow. Do you want to grow? Then there is no substitute – get into God's Word!

It concerns me when I see a professing Christian with seemingly no appetite for God's Word – there is something really wrong if that's the case:

e.g. You wouldn't go to the family meal table at home, and whenever the food was set down in front of you, get up and walk away without eating anything!

Maybe an odd time you would, if you weren't feeling well, but if you were doing that constantly, then people would have a right to be concerned about you. Well, why then do some Christians come to church and then switch off when God's Word is being preached? It's supposed to be food for our souls! We need it to make us grow strong!

Conclusion

Of course, all the Bible reading in the world will do us no good unless we have first tasted of the Lord Himself (v.3). Bible reading can't save anyone in and of itself, but the Lord Jesus the Bible points to, certainly can.

I hope you have tasted that the Lord is good? (v.3)

Well if so, then continue to feed upon his Word in the days ahead, and may we all continue to grow up together in our salvation.

And let's remember that God's Word is **our absolute** in all matters of faith and practice – not your ideas or mine. Let's make sure we are submitting ourselves to the authority of Scripture, and not forcing Scripture to submit to our own preconceived ideas about how things should be done in church.

© Ian Grant